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Address

by

Col. Edward Jay Allen

to

McPherson Post No. 117, G. A. R.

At Homewood Cemetery

Pittsburgh

on

Memorial Day

1901



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By transfer

White House.

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THE ADDRESS

Comrades and Friends :

IN THIS silent city of the dead, we have assembled on a day appointed for that purpose to do honor to their memory. It is fitting that we should do so to all the dead, whether they have lived lives that have made them known of men, or whether they lived the quiet days of a simple life, and sank into their final rest unwept beyond the narrow circle of their friends. For we know that the years of even the humblest man have been full of trials and sorrows, and that life is indeed a battle, with its victories and its defeats, its hardships and its consolations.

About us the grass grows green above graves of those whom we have never known,

but whose lives have been full of sacrifice and self-abnegation; and the mourners come and go, holding in their hearts the sacred trust of their affection. All that life could offer these dear departed ones, all its hopes and aspirations, all its tender thought, all its loving ties, are gone forever. There is left only their memory, and a legacy of sorrow; and this inheritance is so certain, that within the sound of my voice there are none to whom it is unknown. Wives, who in the lapsing years have seen the lover of their youth grow into the more loved father of their children, whom at last they followed into this serene God's Acre, and felt life stand still because of the loss of the one who had been their solace and comfort in all the ills of life; fathers, who have seen the hope of their future years laid under the daisied sod; mothers, who look upon the little graves and feel yet the clinging arms of the young babe about their necks. The young lie here, and the old. All find this common resting place. Who can tell of the living

what sorrows they cherish, what dear memories of the dead are always with them?

“Man goeth to his long home, and the mourners walk the streets.”

These who once lived have gone beyond our criticism. Maybe while they lived we saw too much the venial fault, considered too little the generous virtues. Some have rounded out a full life, with ample fulfillment. Some have, in our weak judgment, failed in their fullest purpose. Some fell by the wayside, and we remember their errors with a charity that we failed to extend when they were with us. “They only faltered in the path which we have tottering trod.” They are all here—all these loved dead. The fair sky is over all; they all have equal rest.

“Here, all along warm summer days

The yellow bees shall come,

Coquetting down the blossomy ways

With fond and ringing hum;

While warbling in the leafy trees
The birds flit to and fro;
Sing sweetly, sweetly, birds and bees,
Because they loved you so."

So in this summer air we remember that here lies all of earth; here is its closure; each grave, a rounded life; each mound, "a tale that is told."

"Earth's grandest epic ends in 'Here he lies,'
And 'Dust to dust' concludes her noblest song."

It is good that we are here; it is fitting that we should honor these dead.

But we are here to-day for more than this. In the history of a great Nation, there came a time when all that the patient years had built up was in a moment threatened with destruction. The Great Republic that shone out as a beacon to the civilized world as "a government of the people, by the people, and for the people," offering a refuge and a welcome to the worn and weary of all lands, resplendent with all that

made a nation glorious, and in the full tide of prosperity and promise, was, by the madness of mad men, placed in such imminent peril that it seemed for a moment that civilization was to turn back on the dial, and a Nation that had filled the earth with wonder and admiration and the generous emulation of patriotic hearts the world over was to disappear and vanish forever.

What a cloud would have fallen upon all mankind! Everywhere in civilized places, men, weary with their toiling lives and hopeless of better days, gazed wistfully westward to where the setting sun looked lovingly down upon a happy land, and dreamed of a joyous time when they might follow their kindred and rest in the peace and security that had been denied their hapless lives. The Republic was a grand protest against caste, a living proof that men could well govern themselves. We were kin to all the world. All peoples were concerned that we should exist and prosper. We offered hope to the hopeless, faith to the despairing, and exalta-

tion to the depressed. And when the booming of the cannon brought upon the reluctant winds the echoes of the assault on the Nation, men stood aghast; the hammer fell from the nerveless hand, the pen dropped from the palsied fingers.

Who shall tell the story of those wonderful days? After weeks of shame and agony, there came the clarion call from the immortal Lincoln, and men sprang to arms. Simple men, who so far had lived their lives in affectionate care for those they loved, were moved by the grander love for all men, that accepted toil, sacrifice, sickness, wounds, even death, for their reward; men who soared beyond the narrower circle of home and home friends, and hazarded—and accepted—death, that the Nation might live. And of these great hearts there were more than a million.

I can see again the constant ranks of blue; I can hear the steady march whose echoes shall be heard through all the ages and shall last

while the earth endures. Of all their heroic deeds, who can tell!

In the old Greek and Roman days, burning words told of brave acts. Our school books tell us of what was done on the plain where

“The mountains look on Marathon,
And Marathon looks on the sea.”

All the ages ring with heroism; but in our day, while here and there the poet has sung, the historian written, and the orator has spoken inspired words, language has failed to tell the wondrous story. Heroism became commonplace. All men so rose to the occasion that scarcely any grand deed could rise above the common act. It was a nation of freemen moved by grand conviction, and fighting as no nation has fought since the old days of Holland.

Through days of deep depression, when the air was full of defeat; through brighter days, when victory crowned our efforts, we recall the weary marches, the rainy, sodden camps; the

night alarms, the attack, the repulse, the hospital, the wild battles where the dead lay in windrows, and the wounded filled the night with horror. How vividly come before our eyes the dead, the dying; the wounded comrade, left on the abandoned field; the thickets where the creeping flame found the wounded with a little life, and left them with scarce a semblance of humanity; the hurried burial in unmarked graves upon meadow slopes and in the shadow of the silent woods. We call to mind the imprisonment, that meant starvation and death; the escape and the baying bloodhounds on the trail; the crackling sound of the volley, the deep booming of the cannon, the bursting shell, the wild cheers of the charge, the exultant capture of the colors; the sullen retreat, and the spitting fire of the muskets; the madness and glory of the advance, the capture of the rifle-pits, the headlong rush over the fortifications—Old Glory floating its silken folds in the sulphurous air, and the wild thrill of victory.

The weeping maidens, wives and mothers who listened to what the winds would bring—and hoped, and feared, and wept—when defeat came, hoped for the consolation that their loved were spared; when the bells rang out for victory, dreaded to hear that brothers, sons, husbands had won the victory by their blood—denied even the knowledge of where they lay, but knowing full well that their last hours were hours of agony, and their last thoughts thoughts of home.

For the soldier, was the compensation of action and the subtle joy of the battle; but to the women who, weeping, consented to his going, there was no relief from the agony of waiting—waiting—dreading—no relief but tears.

I see about me those who were actors in this great drama—soldiers who fought, women who wept; and around me are the graves of the illustrious dead. The summer sun shines fair, the birds sing, the flowers bloom, and more than a quarter of a century has passed away since

those troubled days. The Great Republic, our own loved Nation, is strong and vigorous; we are filled with patriotic love, knowing that in ages to come she will shine forth with ever greater radiance, the bright exemplar of all nations and peoples.

And we feel that this should be so, for she has not been forgetful of those who fought and those who died for her. This day of days she has set apart as a Memorial Day when we shall specially remember her years of peril and her brave defenders, and has said: "This day shall remain upon the record forever and forever; it shall be sacred to the Nation's Dead, and shall be a day when their graves shall bloom with flowers, and the Nation's gratitude shall be manifest to all men."

The Grand Army of the Republic, soldiers who survived the hazards of war, instituted the sacredness of this day, formulated the methods of its observance, and faithfully through all the years have cared for the graves of their com-

rades. Each Memorial Day, over all the land, in cemeteries and in obscure burial places, the tiny flag droops over the patriotic dead, and claims for the soldier the tribute of flowers.

Yearly they come with lessened numbers, and the feet that once kept time to the music of the drum and fife now mount these slopes with faltering steps. The fleeting years have borne away their youth, but their affectionate enthusiasms and love for their old comrades is as bright and clear as when, upon the first observance of this day, they placed the significant white, red and blue flowers on the graves of the Nation's dead. And so they will continue to do until the last survivor of the Old Guard totters up these summer slopes, and solitary and alone, surrounded by his dead comrades, lays down his last tribute of blossoms in this enclosure where year after year the lessening column listened to the memorial service for the heroes gone before.

We trust their duties will be worthily dis-

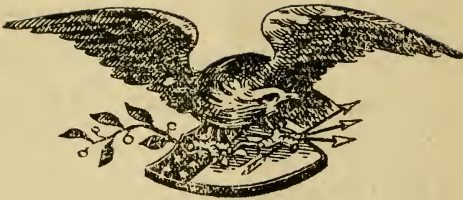
charged by the Sons of Veterans who succeed them, and the honored dead continue to be honored. Memorial Day has become a time when all the dead are specially remembered, and so this enclosure is thronged with those who bring tokens of their affection and undying memories. It were fitting if they also made it a day of national remembrance, and it would be a graceful act if all, from their wealth of bloom, would spare a few blossoms for the soldier whose last resting place is near that of their own beloved ones. Let us hope that this may grow into a custom such that if the time should come when there were no organized societies to fulfill this loving trust, it would still be done, because of the remembrance of all Americans whose own grief recalled the past lives and services of these patriots.

But the Grand Army still lives and still fulfills its mission, yearly bringing blossoms to the graves of its loved comrades. And so we are here to-day to do honor to these dead, and

we believe that when we have passed away this day will still be sacred and these soldiers still remembered.

We respect all the dead, for we know that they have lived, and to live means to all men, according to their temperament and environment, a degree of toil, affection and self-abnegation. But to these dead of the Republic who have added to this an unselfishness and love that encompassed a whole Nation, shall we not give larger tribute? For "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."

So upon these sacred graves we place our flowers; with grateful hearts recall their glorious deeds; and in the serene summer air leave them to their sacred rest and to the Eternal care.



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